

COURAGEOUS Wycombe Wanderers finally bowed out of the F.A. Cup on Tuesday night — in the best possible style. After holding mighty Middlesbrough for 89 minutes they succumbed to a Dave Armstrong goal and then a minute later were given their biggest-ever ovation from the 30,000 crowd.

As the players — absolutely exhausted, having played their hearts out for the second time in a few days — gathered on the half-way line, the crowd rose to their feet and applauded them from the field. The chants of "Boro! Boro!" from the mass of red scarves behind one goal turned to "Wycombe! Wycombe!" as the partisan supporters paid their tribute having watched one of the bravest displays for many a year. The Middlesbrough players, through at last after battling for 179 minutes against a team of amateurs, formed a tunnel to add their tribute.

It was a fitting finale for Wanderers, who had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams in getting this far in the F.A. Cup. Never before had they reached the third round but after giving the First Division joint leaders a real run for their money on Saturday, they came to Ayresome Park and showed more courage, stamina and bravery than anyone could have expected.

Boro chairman, Mr. Charles Amer, breaking open the champagne in the changing rooms afterwards, told me he had never seen such an ovation given to the opposing side in his 30 years with the club. You can't get higher praise than that.

Jack Charlton, the Boro boss

who had stated before the game, "We'll murder them," had nothing but praise for the Wycombe men. "They made us fight all the way. It was a great performance and they fully deserved that applause at the end."

Wycombe president Mr. Monty Seymour described the Blues' display as "magnificent." "I have never seen Wycombe give a finer performance in my 50 years with the club. They all played their hearts out. The support, too, was terrific."

And Brian Lee, Wanderers'

believable saves. Not far behind him were the two centre backs, Alan Phillips and Keith Mead who bore the brunt of the Boro blitz. Gary Hand, too, had a game to remember.

Inevitably the stars were in defence but great credit should go to their midfield men for sticking to their task while upfront Steve Perrin again looked a player destined for the pro' ranks sooner or later.

SAME SIDE

Wanderers kept the same 12 that had the better of the

inside the Blues' box but his shot screamed past the upright.

Wanderers showed their intentions by trying anything from long range when Howard Kennedy cannoned in a 40-yard free kick, but the ball struck a defender and was cleared.

With the home side beginning to use the full width of the pitch, the danger signs became all too apparent for Wycombe. Armstrong was the chief danger man, giving Paul Birdseye a torrid time on the wing while Mills and Hickton were always menacing.

managed to take the sting off the ball and then save on the line.

The Middlesbrough surge was halted temporarily in the 27th minute when Wycombe produced their best move of the game. Three first time passes by Birdseye, Searle and Perrin took the ball sweeping upfield with Boro helpless. Searle crossed from the by-line as the home defenders struggled to make the ground and Perrin lashed in a short range shot at the near post.

Platt, however, was perfectly positioned to save, holding the drive well.

FRESH HOPE

That gave Wycombe fresh hope and as the crowd began to barrack the home team, Boro made more and more errors. Passes were intercepted and in general, Wanderers found themselves with more time. Distribution, however, was poor and many of their attacks were broken up by the towering Stuart Boam and Willie Maddren.

There were occasional flashes of skill, like when Gary Hand chipped a superb ball over Boam for Holifield to cross but at half-time, Wycombe's greatest feat had been to hold Middlesbrough to 0-0, something few people had anticipated.

Wycombe began the new half with a flourish, taking the game to Middlesbrough and as time wore on, the home side must have been growing more and more worried. They went close many times but with Phillips playing a captain's role at centre back, they were thwarted time and again.

Wycombe's main hope for a goal stemmed from Kennedy but his shooting was often wild and on a couple of occasions a cross looked a better bet with men waiting in the middle.

It was a measure of Middlesbrough's problems when they replaced Alan Foggon, the top goalscorer, in the 61st minute with Alan Willey. The move, however, brought more danger for Wycombe.

Maskell dived full-length to save from Armstrong's cross and then held a swirling corner from Spraggon minutes later. With 70 minutes gone, Willey almost snatched the lead. From another corner, the ball came over the defence to Mills who volved a square ball into the centre. Willey got up well just a few yards out but saw his header hit the upright and bounce clear.

"Lady Luck" was certainly smiling on Wycombe, but they fully deserved it for the way they continued to withstand the growing Middlesbrough pressure.

Dylan Evans came on for Tony Horseman with 16 minutes left. "Bogger" had struggled to get going throughout the game and was given little chance against the towering home defence. It was a shame the Middlesbrough fans did not have a chance to see his vintage skills.

Boro went close again in the 82nd minute. They easily broke up a Wycombe free kick with Craggs sending Souness clear in midfield. He found Mills who ran into the box at a narrow angle and seemed certain to score. Maskell, however, spread himself full-length and blocked the shot with his legs.

A minute later Mills set up Armstrong with a superb flick and after running 40 yards, the latter found Willey in space. In an amazing dribble, the substitute beat three defenders in the box with fine control but then saw his shot saved by Maskell again.

Wanderers were now well and truly on the rack. Subjected to a fierce all-out battering, they defended doggedly and just when it seemed they would take the match into extra time, Boro scored.

It came after Maskell had saved another cross by diving full-length seconds earlier. Craggs collected one of the many hasty clearances and found Souness. He spotted Armstrong in space and placed the ball perfectly to his feet. Cutting inside, the blonde striker beat one defender and then slipped the ball wide of the goalkeeper.

It was a killer blow for Wycombe. But, with extra time only seconds away and Boro in full flight, the damage could have been even greater in the time added on.

The whistle went a few seconds after the goal but in true character, Wanderers had time to mount one final attack when Kennedy crossed into the box but no-one could get a touch.

It was this kind of fighting spirit that has taken Wanderers to their best-ever run in the F.A. Cup. They won 29,000 new friends at Middlesbrough on Tuesday night with a performance that must rank as one of the bravest in the year.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mills, A. Phillips, G. Hand, M. Holifield, T. Horseman, H. Kennedy, A. Horseman (sub, D. Evans), 74 mins, K. Searle, S. Perrin.

MIDDLESBROUGH: J. Platt; J. Craggs, W. Maddren, S. Boam, F. Spraggon, H. Charlton, G. Souness, D. Mills, A. Foggon (sub, P. Willey, 61 mins), J. Hickton, D. Armstrong.

Attendance: 30,128.

Sports post

SIR

As one who has watched every one of Wycombe Wanderers recent F.A. Cup matches from that rather miserable day at Marlow last September, to the ultimate defeat at Middlesbrough tonight, I would like to express my appreciation of the club's achievement. I journeyed to Middlesbrough vaguely hopeful that they would not concede more than four goals. In the event they inevitably were defeated, but not before playing the most glorious rearguard action — John Maskell will surely never play a better game in his entire life!

I came away from Middlesbrough strangely elated and although knowing that the glamour and glory is now over — for a year at least! — I could not have been more proud had they won the cup itself. The fact that Wycombe received a standing ovation at the end of the game tells its own story — they gave their all and to misquote a well known phrase this was surely their finest hour and a half!

Our town has a gallant band of heroes of which it can and should be justly proud, and I personally consider myself privileged to have been a witness to another page in the club's long history.

Yours faithfully,
Dennis H. Ford,
112 Telford Way,
High Wycombe



Middlesbrough goalkeeper Jim Platt gathers this cross safely as Steve Perrin (right) closes in during Tuesday's replay. More pictures of the match appear on page 26.